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OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

21 November 1955

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 82-55

SUBJECT: Preliminary Views on Soviet Foreign Policy in the Light of the Foreign Minister's Meeting.\*

1. The substantive positions which the USSR maintained at the Foreign Minister's Conference contained no surprises, but the manner in which Molotov presented his case was considerably less adroit than we had anticipated. His completely intransigent conduct of the debate on German unification was not in itself surprising in view of the limited maneuverability which the Soviet position on this issue imposed. But his equally unaccommodating position on the less restrictive topics of disarmament and East-West contacts was harder to understand. On the latter issue, in particular, some measure of agreement had been expected since the cost to the USSR of minor concessions would have been minimal and the rewards considerable. At the last minute, Molotov seemed to be trying to repair some of the damage he had done to the climate of amicability created at the Summit meeting, but the impression remained strong that the Soviet attitude toward the West had markedly hardened.

2. While the change was one of manner and not of substance, we should probably not rely too heavily upon this distinction in attempting to assess the significance of the new attitude. In NIE 11-13-55, we pointed out that the Soviet leaders recognize that the USSR's impact on the Western world is determined not only by the substance of the Soviet position but by the manner of Soviet conduct as well. Nevertheless, we should note that there has not always been a close and complimentary parallelism between Soviet public conduct and its basic policy. Episodic fluctuations in its public mood have taken place despite the overall consistency which Soviet policy has exhibited since Stalin's death. This history of basic consistency should warn us against a too hasty assumption that the stiffening of Soviet attitude which we have witnessed marks a change in mood which will persist for any very long period.

\* This memorandum was in progress before NIE 11-13/1-55 was initiated. It is being published at this time for the information of the Board, and contains some preliminary views relevant to the new estimate. However, neither the scope nor all the judgments contained herein are intended as forerunners of NIE 11-13/1-55.

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3. In large part, the change in attitude can be explained in terms of the limited objectives the Soviet leaders probably had in mind on entering the Foreign Minister's meeting. They probably looked upon the meeting as useful in furthering their policy in Germany but as superfluous in other respects. With respect to Germany their aim was to provide a conclusive demonstration of the futility of Four-Power negotiations on German unity in order to convince the West Germans that their only hope for unity lay in a rapprochement with East Germany. While the proposals they presented could hardly have been considered enticing, they probably felt that only by shutting off all other recourse could they force the West Germans into serious negotiations. The more general objectives in Europe which their policy had sought over the past few months had probably, in their view, already been achieved in the main. At the Summit meeting they had gained what they probably believed to be a tacit recognition of the status quo in Europe and assurance that the West did not wish to resort to war. With their main concerns in Europe thus satisfied, and their attention increasingly preoccupied with developments in other parts of the world, the Soviet leaders probably believed that they should limit themselves at the Foreign Minister's meeting to the objective which that occasion could best be made to serve, the advancement of their policy in Germany. Some further minor concessions could have been spared to keep the glow of Geneva alive, but the Soviet leaders are not in the habit of making gratuitous gestures or of offering payments except for full value received.

4. The Soviet leaders probably foresaw that to achieve the impact which they desired in Germany they would have to risk a setback in their policy of relaxation in Europe. They probably would have been reluctant to take this risk if they anticipated trouble with the US as a result of a more active Soviet policy in the Middle East or Asia. On the other hand, they may have calculated that the gains which they could eventually expect in Germany from their negotiating policy were of such overriding importance that they would have to accept the disadvantages of a reinvigorated Western unity which their harder posture might entail. It is also possible that the Soviet leaders hoped by their intransigent stand to convince other US allies that present Western policies on Germany should be modified.

5. Soviet concern over the softening effects which their relaxation policy could have on Communist discipline at home could also have figured in their decision to dampen the Geneva spirit. Historically, the Soviet regime has depended upon international tensions, real or imagined, to justify to its own people the rigors and privations involved in its domestic policies and even the regime's own existence. It is possible that the Soviet leaders anticipated some embarrassment vis-a-vis their administrative echelon in squaring demands for a continued step-up of heavy industrial and military production with a continuing mood of international amicability.

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6. In addition to the considerations suggested above, it is also possible that a shift of influence within the Soviet ruling group was in part responsible for the change in Soviet demeanor. This possibility is suggested by the sequence of events, both before and during the Foreign Minister's meeting, which appear to be related to Molotov's personal status within the ruling group, and possibly also to the views which he is known to favor. Molotov's remark before leaving Moscow after the 7 November celebration that he was bringing "better baggage" back to the conference could be interpreted as meaning a change to a negotiating policy with which he was in closer sympathy. Observers at the conference noted the stiffening in the Soviet position which took place after his return. If their impression is correct, the inference could be drawn that the change in Soviet attitude reflected a high level decision taken at that time. Molotov's deportment subsequently at the Foreign Minister's meeting suggests that, if such a decision was taken, it was done at his urging, or at least had his hearty support.

7. In the eight or nine months prior to the Foreign Minister's meeting, Molotov's decline had been steady and well marked. His apparent attempt to slow down Malenkov's peaceful co-existence policy in February was reversed in the following weeks; the policy with which he had been associated in Yugoslavia was publicly repudiated. As the new regime's policies began to unfold, it became increasingly clear in the West that critical negotiations in foreign policy were being taken out of the hands of Molotov, and figures such as Mikoyan and Shcherilov began to assume more active roles in this field. At the July Plenum, it is reported, Molotov was censured for opposing the regime's policy toward Yugoslavia. In October he had to suffer the humiliation of confessing to ideological deviation.\*

8. If the hardening of Soviet policy at the Foreign Minister's meeting reflects the reemergence of Molotov's influence in Soviet foreign policy, this could indicate that a debate within the leadership over major policies had been resolved in his favor. The issue and terms of such a possible debate must remain obscure. Molotov has in the past been associated with the view that a crisis in world capitalism was imminent, and has apparently believed that Soviet policy should assume a defensive wait-and-see attitude while awaiting the Western catastrophe. The present leadership, on the other hand, has been at pains, most recently on the occasion of Molotov's censure, to take a less doctrinaire view of capitalism's potential and viability. This attitude, it may be assumed, has played some part in their willingness and desire to come to terms with the West for the longer haul. The recent agitation in Soviet learned circles over the issue of the crisis of capitalism may have reflected higher level concern with this problem. It may even be speculated that Kaganovich's prediction, in his 7 November speech, of Communism's triumph in the twentieth century marked a resolution of the debate along the lines which Molotov, among others, has favored.

\* For an analysis of the regime's objectives in this affair, see Appendix.

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9. On the whole, we are inclined to think that controversies which take place within the Soviet ruling group are more practical in their terms and less conclusive in their issue. At the same time, we believe that collective leadership has almost certainly had as one of its consequences an encouragement of controversy within the Soviet leadership over major policy issues. Freedom of debate has probably given an advantage to those with forceful personalities and fresh ideas, but at the same time has encouraged the more cautious to stick stubbornly to their guns. In this atmosphere of divided counsel, doubts and uncertainties from time to time have almost certainly been raised in the minds of the top leaders themselves. Even Khrushchev has not been immune, if we are to believe the report, attributed to Nehru, of his misgivings on the eve of the Summit Conference. It is in this context of free give and take that we would interpret any influence which Molotov may have brought to bear in shaping Soviet negotiating policy at the Foreign Minister's conference. We think it quite likely that Molotov did urge the policy which was in fact adopted, but we think that the decision was reached mainly for the reasons set forth in the earlier paragraphs of this memorandum.

#### Conclusions

10. In the review of NIE 11-13-55 which is now scheduled two main criticisms are likely to be raised. One is that the paper over-estimated the degree and duration of the change in Soviet policy implied by the Summit meeting and prior Soviet conciliatory actions. The other is that the paper may have implied too wide a scope for the new policy, by at least tacitly permitting the inference that the Soviet desire for relaxation in Europe would bring a concomitant moderation of policy in other areas.

11. As the analysis, presented in the foregoing paragraphs, of the Soviet position at the Foreign Minister's meeting will make clear, we find no persuasive reason to revise the view of Soviet policy which we have previously held. The reasons given, especially in paragraph 3, for the Soviet attitude at the meeting are fully consistent with the general policy aims which were ascribed to the USSR in NIE 11-13-55. While it is possible that a temporary reversion to toughness has taken place, coinciding with some fluctuation of opinion within the Kremlin, we believe that over the longer run the Soviet leaders will continue to believe that keeping international tensions at ebb is in their own best interests.

12. With respect to the second criticism, we did not attempt an area by area review of Soviet policy and the paper was focused largely on European issues as was the Summit meeting itself. Insofar as the broader problem was treated, we probably erred by failing to measure adequately the dimensions of maneuverability open to the USSR within an overall policy of relaxation. The degree of coordination and coherence in Soviet policy has been a persistent problem. Some observers see a very high degree of coordination, even to the


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extent of interpreting Soviet diplomatic moves in Europe in terms of the effects such moves are presumably calculated to have in the Far East or elsewhere. While there have sometimes been indications of such skillful coordination, we incline to the view that Soviet foresight is more often less effective. What is needed is a formula which will adequately convey the inter-relationship among the various levels at which Soviet policy probably operates: its overall guiding aims; its aims in particular are worked out in terms of local opportunities and requirements; its often groping and exploratory maneuvers employed in implementing either of the above.

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APPENDIX

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE KOMMUNIST EDITORIAL WHICH ACCOMPANIED  
MOLOTOV'S LETTER OF SELF-CRITICISM

1. The Kommunist editorial "explains" the censure only in the sense that it clarifies the lessons which the regime wished the party to associate with Molotov's disgrace. Unlike the documents connected with Malenkov's demotion, there is no hint in the Kommunist editorial that Molotov's ideological aberration had been responsible for failures in the past. The whole thrust of the message is to the future. Molotov's recantation was not required to accomplish the aims of the editorial, but it undoubtedly added weight to its message. Guided by inner-party gossip and their sophistication in Communist arts of communication, party members can almost certainly see more in this message than we can, but even outsiders can probably grasp the message in its main outlines. In brief, it appears to run somewhat as follows:

Confident of its power and the potentialities and prospects of the Soviet Bloc, the regime has embarked on a flexible and imaginative foreign policy. It has taken steps, particularly with respect to Yugoslavia, which have apparently raised doubts about its prudence and even perhaps its faithfulness to Marxist orthodoxy. Since, however, the policies of the regime can all be embraced within the rubrics of "creative Marxism", these doubts are groundless and cannot be tolerated. Not only is the regime determined to press ahead with its present flexible policies, but new and unusual steps should be anticipated, possibly in the direction of a modification of present modes of relationship between the USSR and its satellites.

2. It will be seen that this reading of the message implies that there had been factions in the party disturbed by, or even opposed to, the evolution which Soviet foreign policy had taken over the past few months. While this impression cannot be textually documented, it is suggested by the self-justifying tone of the editorial. Moreover, the blows at dogmatism in the editorial appear to be aimed at something real and to be more than mere foils for the argument in favor of "creative Marxism." In sum, while this interpretation rests essentially on a subjective impression, the editorial appears to be in the form of a rebuttal to unnamed individuals, for whom Molotov was presumably the symbol if not indeed the spokesman, who had questioned the wisdom of the regime's present policies.

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3. The affirmative elements in the party's message can be documented more clearly. Stating that the party attaches tremendous significance to the correct evaluation of the present stage of the struggle for communism, the editorial explains that a faulty evaluation can lead to an "underestimation of the forces and potentialities of the socialist system." Since all phenomena must be analysed from the angle of the struggle of the new with the old, such underestimations can be particularly injurious in the field of foreign policy. There "the struggle between progressive and reactionary forces, the constant changing of the forms and methods of this struggle" necessitates a creative approach to policy problems, and "attempts to cling to dogma are...impermissible."
4. Particularizing its message, the editorial claims a new type of foreign policy for the "commonwealth of socialist states," which employs the "greatest respect and tact in regard to the national feelings of peoples." Urging a "mutual exchange of experience in socialist construction among the fraternal countries", (including, it seems, Yugoslavia) the editorial notes that in making their several contributions, "community in fundamentals...does not exclude...originality in the concrete forms, methods, means, and also in the tempos of socialist transformation." It is also possible that a hint suggesting the gradual evolution of a new course toward the Satellites was intended by the phrase "commonwealth of socialist states". It may indicate that at least the form of a looser confederation among the states of the Soviet Bloc than presently exists was in the minds of the Soviet leaders, and that the phrase was used as a sign of the direction in which their thought in this matter is moving.
5. While the telescoping of impact involved in editing may overemphasize the points noted above, the quoted statements at least establish that the regime wished to record:
- a. Its optimism regarding the trend of events in the contest between socialism and the west,
  - b. Its determination to exploit opportunities for Communist advances in a creative and flexible way, and
  - c. Its intention to push forward with a less rigid approach in its relations with Yugoslavia, and possibly also with the other countries of the "commonwealth of socialist states."

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